

this shell game. Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support my legislation, which will wall off social security by removing it from the unified budget calculations.

#### WHY DO REPUBLICANS WANT TO GIVE TAX CUTS TO THE WEALTHY INSTEAD OF PROTECTING AND EXPANDING MEDICARE WITH THE BALANCE OF THE SURPLUS?

(Ms. SCHAKOWSKY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks and include therein extraneous material.)

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Madam Speaker, I have been pleased to hear some of my Republican colleagues express a willingness to go along with President Clinton's plan to devote 62 percent of the budget surplus to social security. But what I cannot understand is why they would rather take the rest of the surplus and give a tax break to the wealthy, instead of protecting and even expanding Medicare so that it covers prescription drugs.

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Before I was elected to public office, I served as director of the Illinois Council of Senior Citizens, and I learned a lot about how hard it can be to grow old in America. Making ends meet on Social Security is not easy, even if one is pretty healthy. But if someone has high blood pressure or diabetes or heart disease or cancer, they could be in real trouble. As any senior can tell us, there are many things Medicare does not pay for, including prescription drugs. In fact, seniors today are paying more of their incomes on health care than before Medicare was enacted in 1965.

Social Security and Medicare. They go hand-in-hand. Seniors understand this. The President understands this. Before giving away the surplus to the rich, I hope the Republicans will get it, too, and support our plan to protect Medicare.

#### CONGRESS SET TO ELIMINATE MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY

(Mr. WELLER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WELLER. Madam Speaker, I rise to really announce some good news, and that is we are ready to make progress on some unfinished business, and that is the issue of eliminating discrimination against married working couples.

My colleagues, let us ask a few questions. Is it not time we eliminated the marriage tax penalty? Is it right—really, is it right—that under our Tax Code married working couples pay higher taxes just because they are married? Is it fair that 21 million married working couples pay on average \$1,400 more just

because they are married than an identical couple living together outside of marriage? In Illinois \$1,400 is one year's tuition at the local community college.

It is simply wrong we are punishing married working couples. Yesterday, we introduced H.R. 6, the Marriage Tax Elimination Act, legislation that now has 224 cosponsors. Think about that; 224 cosponsors. How often do we have a majority of the House as cosponsors of legislation on its first day? That is good news.

I believe we can work together this year to eliminate the most unfair discrimination in the tax code. Let us work together, let us work in a bipartisan way, let us eliminate the marriage tax penalty.

Madam Speaker, I include for the RECORD a letter from a constituent of mine and a press release from the Speaker of the House on the subject matter of my speech this morning.

JANUARY 6, 1999.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN WELLER: Over the past year or so, my husband Shad and I have read with some surprise and some relief about your efforts to eliminate the "marriage tax penalty." When we set out to marry, no one warned us such a tax even existed on married couples. Our relief, of course, came in knowing that our U.S. Representative is trying to do something to right the wrong.

Shad and I are both teachers in Will County. Shad teaches 11th grade English and I teach junior high reading. Neither of us make a lot of money, but we are dedicated to our jobs and the children we teach. You can imagine our surprise when we realized how the marriage tax affects us. When we followed up with tax preparers and your staff, we learned that our 1997 salaries are facing a \$957.00 marriage tax penalty.

We have actually read articles in the paper where scholars have dismissed the marriage tax as inconsequential on a working family's day to day struggle to make ends meet. Instead, they argue that the amount of money lost to the government by eliminating the marriage tax would be a great "tragedy." In fact, during last year's elections, I heard a candidate suggest that if \$1,400 plays such a large stake in a couples decision to marry, perhaps they have no business getting married in the first place. Although I am no economic scholar, and Shad and I would be married despite the financial consequences the government places on our marriage, I take offense to that sort of thought process.

Fourteen hundred dollars may not seem like a lot to some, but as we prepare to bring our first child into the world, we will face a penalty of \$957. That \$957 could buy 3000 diapers or pay for a years worth of tuition for our graduate school education. Aside from the poor message the marriage tax sends to young couples like ourselves, the money it costs—no matter how large or small the amount—could be used on things we need now. It troubles me to know that as Shad and I continue to teach and earn a little more money as time goes by, so too will our "marriage tax" grow.

It appears to me Congressman Weller, eliminating the marriage tax seems to be the right choice. Shad and I will continue to follow your efforts in Washington with great interest (as will our married friends back home). Last year it appeared that Washington was ready to eliminate the marriage tax. What went wrong?

Sincerely,

MICHELLE AND SHAD HALKAN.

#### SPEAKER'S STATEMENT ON RESERVING H.R. 6 FOR REPEAL OF MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY

WASHINGTON, D.C.—House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) today released the following statement on reserving H.R. 6 for the Marriage Tax Penalty Elimination Act:

"It's ridiculous that our onerous tax code makes it more expensive to be married than to be single. The government should not punish married working couples by taking more of their hard-earned money in taxes than an identical couple living outside of marriage. I am proud to reserve one of this Congress' top bills, H.R. 6, for the Marriage Tax Penalty Elimination Act.

"The Republican-led Congress has a strong commitment to returning more of each American's hard-earned money to his or her own pocket. The government often acts as if it owns the earnings of all Americans, as if each American worked for the government and not the other way around. This is wrong. We believe that all Americans deserve to keep more of their own money—after all, it's your money and you can save and spend it more wisely than Washington can."

J. DENNIS HASTERT,  
*Speaker of the House.*

#### CONSENSUS IS 62 PERCENT OF BUDGET SHOULD GO TO SAVE SOCIAL SECURITY

(Mr. WEINER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WEINER. Madam Speaker, there is now reaching a point of consensus that 62 percent of the surplus in the budget should go to save Social Security and preserve it at least to the year 2055. With God's good graces, we will all be here to enjoy that extended life of Social Security.

What the President has also proposed is equally important, perhaps even more so, and that is that 15 percent, almost \$700 billion, be put away also to help improve Medicare today, and that includes extending prescription drug benefits to seniors.

As much as we have heard about the proposals for tax cuts, an across-the-board tax cut will not get an average senior even through a single year covering their prescription drug costs. Yet, on the other the other side of the aisle, we hear nothing about improving Medicare for today's seniors. Instead, 37 percent of their plan goes to a tax cut, 1 percent goes to defense, and nothing else goes for things like prescription drugs.

My colleagues, with the cost of living adjustment for seniors this year being only 1.2 percent, we need to recognize that today's seniors, not those a generation from now, need prescription drugs covered.

#### INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 2, DOLLARS TO THE CLASSROOM

(Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, today Republicans in